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ABSTRACT

In 1972 and 1973, 7 southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) were surveyed to determine household head or spouse's perceptions of quality of life (QOL) in their county of residence and to determine perceptions of change in quality of life for their family situations, within their counties, and the U.S. over the past 10 years. Independent variables employed were: size of household; age of household head; education of household head; adult's capability of work index; dependency index; occupational satisfaction; material items; communication items; leisure time participation intensity; income; total material and communication items; occupation; occupation minus five years; and social participation of head and spouse. For total respondents, the largest coefficient (.30) was for the income variable suggesting that increasing or relatively larger household income is associated with positive perceptions of QOL; the "other" race category comprised essentially of Native Americans yielded a coefficient of .34 for leisure time participation suggesting that leisure time activities are important to this group when contributing to positive QOL perceptions; there were consistently large coefficients for associations between income and positive QOL perceptions for the open country, hamlet/village, and town residents; in the city residence category, a .40 correlation was recorded for the dependency index, suggesting that the presence of dependent persons in urban households is associated with negative QOL perceptions. (JC)

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RESPONDENT PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE: FINDINGS FROM SURVEY RESEARCH IN RURAL COUNTIES OF SEVEN SOUTHERN STATES

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Introduction

The author's major purpose of writing this manuscript is to present results of research conducted to determine respondent perceptions of quality of life (QOL). An overview of the research leading to these findings and a very brief review of literature will be presented. The topic of QOL is justified in order to answer questions about the functioning of basic institutions in society. It is assumed that quantitative determinations can be made regarding how well institutions are serving the needs of the people. These questions may be approached through survey research, in which respondents are asked about their well-being. Two additional components are apparent in the literature. One comprises QOL indicators that are derived from secondary data. The other considers normative components to be important determinants of QOL: e.g., kinship and other social attachments, climate and other aesthetic desires, and perceptions of a given locality. Unfortunately, these two components are rarely considered by the same authors or in the same references on this topic (Kamrany and Christakis, 1970).

Ben-Chieh Liu and David M. Smith provide concepts and variables to guide utilization of secondary data for QOL indicators. Liu lists variables, in addition to income, that he considers important in the measurement of QOL. These variables are: (1) psychological and physical environment; (2) individual status; (3) individual equality

(race and sex discrimination); (4) living conditions -- general and social environment plus available facilities; (5) economic status -- cost adjusted income, partial productive employment situation in labor available resources and existing technical conditions; (6) technological development; (7) agricultural production; (8) health and welfare provisions; (9) educational development; and (10) state and local government (Liu, 1975, 1-13).

Smith, a geographer, has formed a composite QOL scale from ten sources concerned with social indicators and social problems. Seven items are included in his scale: (1) income, wealth, and employment; (2) the living environment; (3) health; (4) education; (5) social order (or disorganization); (6) social belonging (alienation and participation); and (7) recreation and leisure (Smith, 70). The Smith and Liu variables may be adapted to national, state, metropolitan, and local analyses. There are, however, some aspects of QOL at the local level that may not be important at other levels. Included in these locality-based factors are a quite neighborhood, social interaction, and personal assimilation. Neither Smith's nor Liu's QOL measures consider these local aspects of level of living.

John Shelton Reed advocates normative components of QOL, but offers little in the way of empirical evidence to support composite QOL measures. Recent research efforts have associated satisfaction and happiness with public services at given local levels (Rojek, et. al., 1975). Nevertheless, survey research efforts to determine QOL perceptions at the local level are in very short supply. The author of this paper has participated in a survey research project

in which the two prevalent components of QOL theory was combined. Respondents were informed of secondary indicators and then asked evaluative questions about criteria such as Liu's eleven and Smith's seven variables, as well as composite QOL perceptions. An overview of the methodology for this survey research follows.

Empirical Research

In 1972 and 1973 surveys were performed in eight Southern States to determine respondents' perceptions of QOL in their county of residence and to determine perceptions of change in quality of life for their family situation, within their county, and the U.S. during the past ten years. The project number was S-79 and was titled "Rural Development and the Quality of Life in the Rural South." The general objective of the research was to obtain, analyze and interpret data from secondary and primary sources that would be useful to officials in rural areas of the South in pursuing the goal of rural development.

Space limitations prohibit discussion of S-79 sampling procedures or of presentation of descriptive characteristics of the S-79 household respondents. This information may be obtained from the author of this paper. Household heads (or spouse of head) were interviewed by social scientists in each of the following states and counties:

Alabama -- Clarke, Monroe, Fayette, Tallopoosa;

Georgia -- Greene, Liberty, Union;

Kentucky -- Harlan, Perry, Whitley, Wolfe;

Mississippi -- Clay, Coahoma, Holmes, Lawrence, Neshoba, Tunica;

North Carolina -- Anson, Ashe, Robeson;

South Carolina -- Georgetown, Jasper, McCormick; and

Tennessee -- Hancock, Houston, Humphreys, Union.

Interviews were also conducted in Louisiana but an item essential to the analysis reported here was omitted from the Louisiana survey. Relatively complete data from the above seven states will be reported in this paper.

Several items on the S-79 household questionnaire were concerned with indicators of respondent perceptions of QOL. Respondents were appropriately informed that the composite topic of inquiry was QOL, as perceived by individuals. Statistical analyses of responses to all items revealed high positive correlation between one item and other respondent perception indicators (Parker and McLean, 1975). This item is stated:

> I have just asked about the county in which you live; how about your own family situation during the past ten years? Are you (a) much better off, (b) somewhat better off, (c) about the same, (d) somewhat worse off, or (e) much worse off?

The order of responses to this item are reversed so that, for statistical analyses, ascending order denotes higher QOL. Responses to this item shall be considered the dependent variable in this analysis.

Findings

The responses to this item are presented in Table 1. For all respondents, 43 indicated "much worse off," 146 indicated "somewhat

worse off," 457 indicated "about the same," 724 indicated "somewhat better off," and 421 indicated "much better off." Although the majority of respondents believed that QOL had improved, concern is also directed to the distribution of responses.

Four subsets of respondents (in addition to total respondents) shall be considered. These categories by the maximum number of respondents for which data are available for statistical analysis, are also presented in Table 1. Numbers of respondents in the several subsets range from 69 in the "other" race category to 1,626 "white" respondents. The initial objective in the S-79 project was to sample only open country households -- thus, a purely rural sample. Household samples for the additional residence categories were included in several states. A total of 14 respondent characteristics were chosen as independent variables for this analysis. These items are representative of traditional socioeconomic and behavioral indicators and ascribed and achieved characteristics. A brief explanation of the 14 variables follows:

Size of Household - actual number of persons in household; not limited to family members.

Age of Household Head - actual age of head in years.

Education of Household Head - actual number of years of school completed.

Adult's Capability to Work Index - an index based on characteristics of adults in the household; the larger the index the greater the disability.

Dependency Index - an index based on age composition of household occupants; the smaller the index the greater the dependency.

Occupational Satisfaction - an index based upon responses to items concerning employment and work attitudes.

Material Items - a score based on cumulative material household items possessed.

Communication Items - a score based on cumulative communication items possessed.

Leisure Time Participation Intensity - an index based on a comprehensive list of leisure time activities for all members of the household.

Income - net monetary income for all members of the household.

Total Items - actual number of material and communication items.

Occupation - occupation of head of household, ordered from high to low status, and based upon a modified Bureau of the Census classification scheme.

Occupation Minus Five - occupation of principal wage earner in household, five years ago, and same as occupation categories above.

Social Participation Head and Spouse - an index based on the sum of head and spouse social participation in organizations, religious groups, and other associations.

The dependent (Y) variable and independent (X) variables are designated as follows:

Dependent Variable:

Y - perception of change in quality of life in family situation.

Independent Variables:

X_1 - size of household

X_2 - age of household head

X_3 - education of household head

X_4 - adult's capability to work index

X_5 - dependency index

X_6 - occupational satisfaction

X_7 - material items

X_8 - communication items

X_9 - leisure time participation intensity

X_{10} - income

X_{11} - total items

X_{12} - occupation

X_{13} - occupation minus five

X_{14} - social participation

Correlation Coefficients

The intercorrelation coefficients, indicating associations between the independent variables and the QOL perception responses, are presented in Table 2. Data for the several respondent categories are also presented in Table 2.

For total respondents, the largest coefficient (.30) was for variable X_{10}, Income. Thus, it is suggested that increasing or relatively larger household income is associated with positive perceptions of QOL. The "other" race category is comprised of essentially Native American respondents. For this category, a coefficient of .34

was recorded for X_9, Leisure Time Participation. It is suggested that leisure-time activities are important to this group of respondents when contributing to positive QOL perceptions.

Consideration of respondents from residence categories reveals consistently large coefficients for associations between income and positive QOL perceptions, for the open country, hamlet/village, and town residents. For the "city" residence category, a comparatively large coefficient (.40) is recorded for X_5, Dependency Index. Presence of dependent persons (dependent age categories) in urban households is associated with negative QOL perceptions. Conversely, presence of individuals in the working ages in urban households may be responsible for positive QOL perceptions.

Regression Analyses

Stepwise regression procedures are utilized to determine significance of associations between QOL and the independent variables for the several subsets of respondents. The composite stepwise regression results are presented in Table 3. The results are presented for each respondent category, with R^2, independent variables, and F-Value probabilities listed for each model.

The R^2 values are greater than .15 for Black respondents and residents from Hamlet/Villages and from Towns. Independent variables remaining in two or more of these models are X_9 (Leisure Time Participation) and X_{11} (Total Communication and Material Items). The F-Value probabilities are less than .05 for all respondent category models except: "other" race category, city respondents, and Georgia

respondents. Concerning the model for South Carolina respondents (the author participated in all phases of the research for the South Carolina contribution to the regional project), the R^2 is .168 and the F-Value probability is .0057. Four independent variables remained in this model: X_3 (Education), X_4 (Adults Capability to Work) X_5 (Dependency Index), and X_{10} (Income).

These results are noteworthy because a range of independent variables are represented in the several models. In the previous paragraph, traditional socioeconomic variables -- income, communication and material items, and education -- are listed. Traditional ascribed variables -- dependency index and capability to work -- are listed. A third category of variables including leisure time participation and occupational satisfaction are also listed. The authors believe that findings regarding these latter two variables are noteworthy. These are behavioral and attitudinal variables and represent a true diversion from traditional socioeconomic and ascribed variables.

The author recommends inclusion of all three categories of variables in subsequent research of this nature. Classic socioeconomic items, ascribed characteristics, and behavioral/attitudinal variables may be useful in explaining variations in survey responses.

Implications

It is worthwhile to recall that perceptions of QOL for family situations and QOL indicators for a county or other entity may not be equivalent. This idea has been suggested by social scientists attempting to design conceptual models of community satisfaction.

From this standpoint, satisfaction with a particular environment is seen to be dependent on an assessment of two fundamental attributes of the environment: (1) the manner in which the attributes are perceived, and (2) the standard or reference against which the attribute is judged. The following discussion is based on this notion of response toward a given environment; e.g., county of residence.

The manner in which an attribute is perceived by people within an environment can affect their opinions in numerous ways. The Great Society programs of the 1960's and social welfare programs of the 1970's such as OEO programs, manpower training programs, school desegregation, comprehensive health care, youth job corps, and student defense loans for education may have been perceived by poor people as a partial reprieve from generations of misery and oppression. These same programs may have been perceived by wealthier persons as higher taxes, political waste of money and infringement upon their constitutional rights. Since the research presented in this paper was performed in the rural South, the feelings on both sides -- recipients and contributors to such programs -- were likely to be strong since the respondents were directly or indirectly affected by these programs.

The standard against which an attribute is judged also plays an important role in respondents' perceptions of conditions contributing to QOL. It is assumed that all categories of respondents in this research provided accurate accounts of these conditions and change in conditions. Respondents not categorized as "lower" socio-economic level from the S-79 sample indicated that their QOL had

improved more than respondents of truly lower socioeconomic status; both groups were comparing past QOL to the present QOL. It is probable that the QOL for non-lower socioeconomic persons had improved more than for lower socioeconomic persons. These variations in perceptions exist because those of the lower life styles are more dependent upon means beyond their control to improve socioeconomic conditions and status. Some of these means were the Great Society programs that were terminated somewhat abruptly.

The lower socioeconomic nouseholds in our survey also had fewer material and communication items. The popular idea that the poor have a cadillac and a color television proved to be a myth. Due to this lack of ownership of such items, it is suggested that the people in the lower socioeconomic categories perceived their QOL relative to their immediate environment and surroundings. On the other hand, non-lower socioeconomic respondents may perceive their QOL relative to a wider environment -- state or nation -- as opposed to their immediate community. Perceptions were based on knowledge that they were at least as well off as "the good life" projected in the mass media. This could mean that the lowest socioeconomic respondents know that their QOL was worse than their neighbors'. Programs to facilitate earned income and subsequent consumption of material and communication items would therefore enhance conditions for lower socioeconomic status people.

The notion of "revolution of rising expectations" may also partially explain these variations. This concept encompasses the idea that if only small quantities of some desired good is consumed,

larger and larger quantities of that good will be desired until the level of maximum utility is obtained. Conversely, the consumer of the good becomes more displeased when restricted to consumption of small amounts of the good than from no consumption at all. This may be the case for lower socioeconomic status respondents of this study. Rising hopes for social programs could have antagonized the recipients into believing that the programs were appeasement for previous impoverishment.

The most obvious explanation for the difference of opinions between the lower and non-lower socioeconomic respondents (from the S-79 sample) is that a real difference did exist. It is suggested that conditions were better, and improved more, for the non-lower socioeconomic status people than for people of lower socioeconomic status. This postulate is associated with previous discussion concerning control of the means to improve conditions.

Four general conclusions shall be stated, all having implications for public policy decisions.

> We must assume, that despite responses to specific questions regarding QOL, the majority of people have freedom of choice, are on their highest indifference curve, and are living in the geographic area where they are maximizing their total utility, given the knowledge they have.
>
> Public programs should be initiated to improve economic opportunities in rural areas; this included non-farm employment, educational programs (all levels), and information about employment in other areas.
>
> All public service programs should be designed and administered to benefit those needing the services.
>
> Social welfare programs should be designed to increase work incentives, and for the able-bodied, social welfare programs should be administered to recipients as means to end and not ends within themselves.

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Table 1. Response to QOL Item by Respondent Category and N Respondents

	No Information	Much Worse Off	Somewhat Worse Off	About The Same	Somewhat Better Off	Much Better Off	N
Total	342	43	146	457	724	421	2,133
Sex							
Male	140	20	68	198	313	201	940
Female	202	23	78	259	411	220	1,193
Race							
White	272	31	112	373	513	325	1,626
Black	67	11	33	72	175	80	438
Other	3	1	1	12	36	16	69
Residence							
No Information	0	0	0	1	3	1	5
Open Country	266	30	110	337	544	282	1,569
Hamlet/Village	46	10	19	67	84	65	291
Town	26	2	10	36	55	41	170
City	4	2	5	10	29	48	98
State							
Alabama	78	17	45	60	89	131	420
Georgia	34	2	17	36	83	35	207
Kentucky	64	13	31	116	164	76	464
Mississippi	94	1	12	47	136	41	331
North Carolina	24	2	18	92	111	42	289
South Carolina	16	2	14	43	57	58	190
Tennessee	32	6	9	63	84	38	232

Table 2. (Continued) Inter-Correlation Coefficients, QOL Perceptions by Independent Variables and Respondent Categories

Independent Variables	State						
	Alabama	Georgia	Kentucky	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina	Tennessee
X_1	.20	.15	.08	.06	.09	-.04	.17
X_2	-.37	-.13	-.20	-.08	-.32	-.13	-.38
X_3	.36	.10	.25	.28	.15	.17	.21
X_4	.32	.07	.20	.17	.27	.07	.26
X_5	.13	.05	.11	.12	.22	.24	.15
X_6	.23	.31	.21	.07	.16	.25	.16
X_7	.26	.17	.28	.22	.19	.16	.25
X_8	.13	.06	.27	.18	.17	.16	.14
X_9	.41	.09	.29	.23	.16	.12	.30
X_{10}	.43	.13	.35	.24	.32	.26	.38
X_{11}	.31	.17	.34	.24	.21	.22	.29
X_{12}	-.19	-.17	-.23	-.11	-.02	.03	-.09
X_{13}	.27	.25	.08	.05	.31	.09	.24
X_{14}	.21	.21	.10	-.04	.06	.09	.16

Table 2. Inter-Correlation Coefficients, QOL Perceptions by Independent Variables and Respondent Categories

Independent Variable	Total	Sex		Race			Residence			
		Male	Female	White	Black	Other	Open Country	Hamlet Village	Town	City
X_1	.10	.09	.12	.16	-.03	.02	.08	.18	.23	.25
X_2	-.25	-.26	-.24	-.28	-.14	-.06	-.24	-.23	-.35	-.24
X_3	.24	.26	.22	.26	.21	.17	.22	.25	.27	-.04
X_4	.19	.24	.16	.25	.02	.18	.19	.24	.29	.10
X_5	.14	.16	.12	.13	.20	.17	.16	.07	.04	.40
X_6	.07	.09	.04	.004	.26	.17	.12	-.12	-.02	.14
X_7	.22	.27	.18	.23	.31	.22	.24	.14	.24	-.09
X_8	.16	.18	.14	.18	.16	.08	.16	.11	.17	.09
X_9	.25	.28	.23	.28	.20	.34	.24	.31	.25	.23
X_{10}	.30	.32	.29	.33	.25	.23	.32	.33	.33	.17
X_{11}	.25	.31	.21	.30	.25	.24	.25	.25	.29	-.13
X_{12}	-.13	-.18	-.08	-.12	-.16	.07	-.10	-.21	-.18	-.04
X_{13}	.17	.13	.20	.17	.13	.23	.18	.16	.12	.12
X_{14}	.13	.13	.14	.12	.16	.21	.15	.12	-.11	.05

Continued

(Continued) Stepwise Regression Results, QOL Model, Fourteen Potential Independent Variables

Model (Y) for Respondent Category	R^2	Variable(s) in Model	EMS	F-Value	PROB>F	Source	B-Values	T:B=0	PROB>T
White	.108	X_2	.663	14.02	.0001	X_2	-.0078	-2.572	.0101
		X_4				X_4	.1366	1.874	.0582
		X_7				X_7	.1308	3.494	.0009
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0024	3.777	.0004
						INT	2.9379		
Black	.273	X_5	.521	12.09	.0001	X_5	.0819	1.708	.0861
		X_6				X_6	.0037	2.551	.0115
		X_7				X_7	-.1082	-1.728	.0825
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0927	4.319	.0001
						INT	2.8268		
Other	.118	X_{14}	.318	3.20	.0830	X_{14}	.0599	1.788	.0830
						INT	3.9358		
Open Country	.114	X_2	.600	11.57	.0001	X_2	-.0070	-2.352	.0180
		X_6				X_6	.0016	2.030	.0404
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0032	3.049	.0028
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0221	2.673	.0078
		X_{13}				X_{13}	.0576	2.107	.0334
						INT	3.3900		

Continued

(Continued) Stepwise Regression Results, QOL Model, Fourteen Potential Independent Variables

Model (Y) for Respondent Category	R^2	Variable(s) in Model	EMS	F-Value	PROB>F	Source	B-Values	T:B=0	PROB>T
Hamlet/Village	.268	X_4	.760	11.08	.0001	X_4	.9885	3.261	.0019
		X_9				X_9	.0031	2.163	.0311
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0583	2.753	.0071
						INT	-1.2626		
Town	.231	X_3	.464	5.00	.0044	X_3	.0443	1.674	.0966
		X_9				X_9	.0027	2.016	.0464
		X_{14}				X_{14}	-.0480	-3.302	.0011
						INT	3.5425		
City	.122	X_1	.229	2.64	.1173	X_1	.1232	1.625	.1173
						INT	4.2201		
Alabama	.354	X_3	.650	16.01	.0001	X_3	.0718	3.044	.0031
		X_4				X_4	.4230	3.011	.0034
		X_6				X_6	.0348	2.520	.0123
		X_9				X_9	.0033	3.181	.0022
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0060	3.397	.0012
						INT	.5020		

Continued

(Continued) Stepwise Regression Results, QOL Model, Fourteen Potential Independent Variables

Model (Y) for Respondent Category	R^2	Variable(s) in Model	EMS	F-Value	PROB>F	Source	B-Values	T:B=0	PROB>T
Georgia	.110	X_6	.644	2.90	.0636	X_6	.0051	1.801	.0746
		X_{13}				X_{13}	.1465	1.707	.0907
						INT	3.1951		
Kentucky	.217	X_6	.667	6.03	.0002	X_6	.0032	1.675	.0928
		X_9				X_9	.0020	1.737	.0815
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0481	2.474	.0142
		X_{13}				X_{13}	-.1218	-2.441	.0155
		X_{14}				X_{14}	-.0429	-2.907	.0047
						INT	3.1430		
Mississippi	.235	X_4	.452	7.27	.0005	X_4	.3062	1.916	.0562
		X_5				X_5	.1238	2.060	.0405
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0390	3.045	.0036
						INT	1.7354		
North Carolina	.144	X_2	.402	4.89	.0038	X_2	-.0139	-2.664	.0090
		X_{12}				X_{12}	-.0845	-1.661	.0963
		X_{13}				X_{13}	.1801	2.929	.0046
						INT	4.2171		

Continued

(Continued) Stepwise Regression Results, QOL Model, Fourteen Potential Independent Variables

Model (Y) for Respondent Category	R^2	Variable(s) in Model	EMS	F-Value	PROB>F	Source	B-Values	T:B=0	PROB>T
South Carolina	.168	X_3	.582	3.98	.0057	X_3	.0472	1.899	.0579
		X_4				X_4	-.1785	-2.043	.0417
		X_5				X_5	.1234	1.835	.0668
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0014	1.777	.0757
						INT	3.7643		
Tennessee	.102	X_5	.416	3.30	.0427	X_5	.1056	-1.7526	.0813
		X_7				X_7	.1338	2.0786	.0396
						INT	3.6788		

Table 3.

Stepwise Regression Results, QOL Model, Fourteen Potential Independent Variables

Model (Y) for Respondent Category	R^2	Variable(s) in Model	EMS	F-Value	PROB>F	Source	B-Values	T:B=0	PROB>T
Total	.108	X_2	.641	15.13	.0001	X_2	-.0049	-1.868	.0588
		X_8				X_8	-.0589	-2.132	.0313
		X_9				X_9	.0008	1.639	.0976
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0022	3.405	.0011
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0361	4.008	.0002
						INT	3.5615		
Male	.131	X_9	.647	19.51	.0001	X_9	.0012	1.749	.0772
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0018	2.513	.0119
		X_{11}				X_{11}	.0376	3.944	.0003
						INT	3.0568		
Female	.147	X_3	.584	8.01	.0001	X_3	.0524	3.151	.0022
		X_4				X_4	.1277	1.745	.0785
		X_8				X_8	-.0710	-2.031	.0408
		X_{10}				X_{10}	.0047	3.599	.0007
		X_{13}				X_{13}	.1291	3.426	.0011
						INT	2.5430		

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